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ABSTRACT

Summaries are presented of papers from a symposium entitled "The Evaluation of Complex Programs Using Participatory Evaluation" that focused on a comprehensive school service program in a south Texas alternative high school. "Theoretical Framework and Objectives" explores the problems of evaluating such programs. Problems result from the complexity and flexibility of the programs, difficulties in evaluating collaboration, and the interdisciplinary nature of the endeavors. "New Research and Evaluation Designs for Comprehensive Service Models" by Jane Stallings provides an overview of the conceptualization of a research and evaluation agenda for complex models in general, and comprehensive service models in particular. "Increasing the Academic and Social Success of Children, Youth, and Families: The Options in Education Programs for High Risk Students" by Tabitha Gutierrez and Larry Kohler describes the Options in Education program created as an alternative for students at risk of school failure and dropout. The program offers comprehensive services to about 200 students from the primarily Hispanic American population of students in the district. "Implementing a Model for Participatory Evaluation: Findings from Three Studies" by Stephanie L. Knight and Karen Duhon describes the use of participatory research and evaluation to assess the Options in Education Program. "Evaluation of Complex Programs Using Participatory Evaluation" by Jane A. Stallings provides further information on the Options program and its evaluation. (Contains 16 references.) (SLD)

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Evaluation of Complex Programs Using Participatory Evaluation

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Evaluation of Complex Programs Using Participatory Evaluation

Theoretical Framework and Objectives

Many programs have sought to address the needs of children and youth who are currently underserved by focusing on collaboration among educators, parents, and community and service agencies (Dryfoos, 1994; Levin, 1994). Regrettably, information about these efforts is incomplete and fragmented. Furthermore, evaluation of comprehensive, collaborative services is often embedded in advocacy literature which describes the process for integration of services, but little information on program effectiveness beyond anecdotal support. For example, in a review of comprehensive programs for young children, Lopez and Weiss (1994) noted that not many programs conduct evaluations and few attempt to link programs to outcomes. While recent attempts to review existing literature have provided some degree of synthesis of studies addressing school-linked comprehensive services (e.g., Chaudry et al., 1991; Crowson & Boyd, 1993; GAO, 1993), studies related to these efforts are "fugitive" at best (Knapp, 1994, p.3).

Methods to collect information about school-linked comprehensive services vary widely (Lopez & Weiss, 1994). Previous studies have often applied traditional experimental methods (e.g., Gomby & Larson, 1992); survey research (Kagan et al., 1990); and multiple project comparative studies (Marzke et al., 1992; Wehlage, Smith, & Lipman, 1992). Case studies are the predominant type of assessment currently used, but they vary widely in quality and comprehensiveness (Crowson & Boyd, 1993). Typically, studies of school-based and school-linked services focus on single programs, often isolated projects not part of a comprehensive approach, which address specific issues such as teen pregnancy or health (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994). Most of these single intervention studies did not randomly assign comparison and intervention groups or match for potentially confounding characteristics; focused primarily on attitudes and knowledge and did not include behavioral, health status, or educational outcomes; and rarely included longitudinal designs (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1993). Furthermore, few studies have addressed cost effectiveness or benefits, an approach which currently is needed to determine the best use of scarce resources (Stallings, 1995).

Several characteristics of school-linked comprehensive service programs make them very difficult to evaluate. In particular, the difficulty is intensified by (a) the complexity and flexibility of the programs making it difficult to adequately identify and characterize the independent variables of interest; (b) the difficulty in assessing quality and degree of collaboration; and (c) the interdisciplinary nature of the endeavor involving researchers from different fields who rarely communicate with each other (Kagan, 1991; Knapp, 1994). In order to address these challenges, alternative approaches to traditional evaluation have been suggested, including participatory evaluation involving stakeholders and clients (Weiss & Greene, 1992) and a developmental approach to evaluation which provides more formative feedback (Gray, 1993).

New Research and Evaluation Designs for Comprehensive Service Models

Jane Stallings,
Texas A&M University

This paper provides an overview of the conceptualization of a research and evaluation agenda for complex models in general, and comprehensive service models specifically. As a result of two working conferences cosponsored by AERA and OERI, progress has been made toward formulating designs which capture the unique characteristics of complex, collaborative systems (U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1995). Previous literature identified issues focusing on engagement of diverse participants perspectives, characterizing the elusive independent variables, locating and measuring outcomes, attributing results to influences, and studying sensitive processes and outcomes (Knapp, 1994). Discussion of these issues at the working conferences resulted in a set of five recommendations including (1) initial in-depth conceptualization of the processes and outcomes of programs; (2) strategies for research and evaluation that are developmental, longitudinal, and participatory or client-driven; (3) use of context appropriate measurement tools; (4) use of evaluators with competencies in both qualitative and quantitative methodologies and experience in participatory methods; and (5) creation of means of dissemination which reach interested researchers, practitioners, and policy makers. These recommendations were used to create and implement an approach to participatory evaluation which seeks to (a) examine change in processes and outcomes over time; (b) provide programs with information which will enable them to build on strengths and address challenges; and (c) establish the relationships between processes and outcomes, including cost effectiveness outcomes which may influence decisions of program implementers and policymakers (Stallings, 1995).

Increasing the Academic and Social Success of Children, Youth, and Families: The Options in Education Program for High Risk Students

Tabitha Gutierrez
Larry Kohler
McAllen Independent School District

This paper describes the Options in Education program created as an alternative for students at risk of school failure and dropout. The program offers comprehensive services to meet the diverse needs of approximately 200 students from the primarily Hispanic population of students in the district. High risk conditions of the students served include family dysfunction, conditions associated with low socioeconomic status, early marriage responsibilities, teen pregnancy, substance abuse, and other barriers to employment or further education. The common bond is that all students have either dropped out of school or have accrued so few credits toward graduation that they would not graduate. In addition, they all chose to apply for entry into the Options program and committed to focus on attitude, attendance, and academics with the help of the program. Program features include individualized, self-paced instruction; summer and evening classes to provide flexibility in scheduling for students; concurrent employment opportunities; personal and group counseling; the services of an on-site social worker and school nurse; and job training in conjunction with the local community college. Pregnant teens receive their basic courses, plus classes in parenting, child development, job skill training, and/or college preparation. Child care is available while students are attending classes.

Implementing a Model for Participatory Evaluation: Findings from Three Studies

Stephanie L. Knight
Karen Duhon
Texas A&M University

This paper describes the use of participatory research and evaluation (Cousins & Earl, 1992) to assess the processes and outcomes of the Options in Education Program. University researchers met with school and district administrators; the district evaluator; school board members; parents; teachers; students; and community and agency representatives to determine the focus and nature of evaluation needed to understand the processes and outcomes of the program and to provide information to improve program efforts and results. Focus group and individual interviews were conducted to determine needs and priorities and to provide a description of the components of the program. As a result, three studies were designed, involving stakeholders in formulation of the questions and variables addressed as well as data collection and analysis. The first study focused on the follow-up of program participants since 1991. Surveys were mailed to approximately 300 former students, with a return rate of almost 40%. Analysis of the responses indicate that 85% of respondents either graduated or received a GED, compared with a 65% graduation rate for this population nationally. Furthermore, 84% were either employed or enrolled in higher education or vocational programs. Using the data gathered in the first study plus information on the costs of program components, cost avoidance analyses were conducted (e.g., Bruner, 1993). For example, information on rate of return for the teen pregnancy program based on program costs and the rate and costs associated with low birth weight babies revealed an annual rate of return of 20% for this component of the Options program.

The second and third studies involve comparison of a sample of Options students (n=85) with a comparison group (n=77) that did not participate in the program. The comparison group consists of students who applied and qualified for inclusion in Options but because of program capacity limitations were not accepted. The two groups were compared using course credits accrued, attendance, courses passed, and Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) results. The Options group performed significantly better on all measures than the comparison group.

The third study was designed to equate possible differences between the Options and comparison group in the previous study. Based on the hypothesis that students accepted to the program might differ from those denied based on attitudes or motivation, a study was planned which would match experimental and comparison students on these attributes. Therefore, the Piers-Harris Self Concept Instrument was administered to the Options group. However, attempts to locate an adequate sample of denied applicants were not successful. Examination of school records revealed that about 50% of the comparison group had dropped out of school, were in jail, or reported moving to other districts. Approximately 20% had subsequently been admitted to Options or another alternative school in the area. Only six percent had graduated or received their GED. Of the original 77, only 15 students were available for comparison.

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Evaluation of Complex Programs Using Participatory Evaluations

Session 27.41

by

Jane A. Stallings

Our symposia entitled The Evaluation of Complex Programs Using Participatory Evaluations will focus on a comprehensive school service program in a south Texas alternative high school and report preliminary outcomes. I will give an overview of the need for Comprehensive School Linked Services. Dr. Stephanie L. Knight, Texas A&M University, will present *New Research and Evaluation Designs for Comprehensive Service Models*. Karen Duhon, Texas A&M University, and John Kohler, McAllen Independent School District, Texas, will present *Increasing the Academic Success of Children, Youth, and Families: The Options in Education Program for High-Risk Students*. Tabitha Gutierrez, of McAllen Independent School District, will be the discussant.

The Comprehensive school linked service movement has been gaining momentum as it becomes clear to more and more of the urban and rural educators and service providers that such partnerships among providers holds the most promise for the success of their clients. It is an accepted fact that the number of low income families not receiving health care has significantly increased during the 1980's and 1990's (500,000 families).

The Plight of Our Children

Cheri Hayes, executive director of the Finance Project wrote in the October 1993 Prospectus that, despite annual public expenditures approaching $350 billion, on education and services nearly a quarter of U.S. children are poor and live in families and communities that cannot meet their basic needs. Despite the broad consensus about the National Education Goals in the late '80s and early '90s, and even with strong indications of public and political eagerness for a renewed emphasis on domestic social policy, fundamental reforms have been slow to materialize in the nation's education, health, welfare, public housing, and social service systems.

There can be little wonder as to why educational interventions based upon the body of teaching and learning research from the 1970s and 1980s, have had so little lasting effect for children at risk of school failure. The answer has taken a long time to emerge, but it is unequivocal: We were not considering the multitude of intervening variables. For example, although we knew that parents were crucial to child learning and that some children depended on the food they received at school for physical sustenance, we rarely included these variables as we assessed school success or school failure. It's clear now that when we assessed interventions, we were not using all the playing pieces. We did not ask in a systematic way "What is required for children to come to school ready to learn, so that their chances for success can be optimized? What are the factors that prevent the best, most creative teachers from succeeding with their students?"

Many factors that prevent even the best teachers from teaching have become clearly visible over the last ten years. Some of these impediments to achieving our National Education Goals for all of our citizens include these frightening facts from the 1994 National Commission on Children report. Imagine in your mind --

- Nearly 13 million children live in poverty, over 2 million more than a decade ago.
- At least one in six children has no health care at all.
- Only slightly more than half of U. S. preschoolers have been fully immunized.
- On any given night, at least 100,000 children are homeless.
- Every year, more than a million young people join the ranks of runaways.
- The overall percentage of students graduating from high school between 1985 and 1990 decreased for whites, African Americans and Hispanics.
- Dropouts are 3.5 times more likely to be arrested than high school graduates. Secretary Riley (1995) says that 82% of all people behind bars are high school drop outs. Drop outs are six times more likely to become unmarried parents.

- Every year, approximately 1 million teenage girls become pregnant. Births to single teens increased 16 % from 1986 to 1991. Data on Figure 1 indicate the increase in birth rates for white adolescents from 1940-1992. (Wynne & Weinstien, 1995).
- The juvenile violent crime arrest rate increased by 300% from 1960 to 1988.
- 135,000 American students bring guns to school everyday.
- Driving after drinking remains the number one killer of adolescents.
- Suicide is now the second leading cause of death among adolescents, and has almost tripled since the 1960s.
- Homicide is now the leading cause of death among minority youth age 15 to 19 and is increasing for white youths.
- Reported child abuse increased 48 % from 1986 to 1991.
- Fifty percent of America's adults are functionally illiterate.

We need multiple approaches from many perspectives to solve these immense social-educational problems. In many parts of the country, anxious communities are forming enlightened partnerships among health, welfare, juvenile justice, and education systems to pool insights and resources. Leadership and funding are coming from school districts, from such organizations as the Children's Aid Society, and from the DeWitt Wallace, Annie Casey, Danforth, Hogg, Stuart, and Ford Foundations. Many pilot projects providing school-linked comprehensive services are already under way; others are being planned.

Why We Need School-Linked Comprehensive Services

The educational enterprise is huge and diverse, and for the majority of our citizens it functions very well, but far too many of our children are at risk of failing, dropping out, and never realizing their potential or their dreams.

Six years ago, I was supervising a student teacher in a third-grade classroom of an inner-city Houston school. A child came into the classroom with silent tears sliding down his cheeks.

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With a few questions and a look into his mouth, the teacher realized that the boy had a painfully abscessed tooth. The child's distress captured everyone's attention. Instruction stopped.

Many of the children from this poor and crime-ridden neighborhood do not come to school ready to learn. Admonitions to teachers to "Put Learning First," can't be executed under these conditions. Unfortunately, for the children in this Houston school, social services and health services are a bus trip away. What is more, the parents in this particular case could not be located. It is not unusual for teachers in this school to have parent permission slips on hand so that they may take children to their own dentist for emergency treatment. In the absence of services linked to the school, even though it is not in their job description, dedicated teachers become social workers or health care workers. The teachers, principal, and parents work many hours to provide the best possible instruction for the children.

Understand that even though this school was in the center of the drug and crime belt, it was better than most other inner-city schools. It had the "I Have a Dream" program and many after-school dedicated volunteer tutors. What it lacked was integrated, school-linked, health and social services that would allow the teachers to teach.

People skilled in health and dental care and in child and family counseling are needed to attend to the children who come to school in pain or deeply disturbed and not ready to learn. While many professionals, agencies, and politicians have strong opinions about the effects on learning of the lack of such services, little research in schools has included the crucial variables: the health and social welfare of the children and their families.

Three years ago, I visited two special schools in McAllen, Texas. One served 75 young women and their babies. I sat beside a 12-year-old girl, Tiwana, and her 2-week old infant as she did her arithmetic. She was getting her problems right. At that school, the young women received their basic courses, plus classes in parenting, child development, job skill training, and/or college prep. The school provided the young students and their preschool children with all of their health and social services at the school site. The principal was a nurse educator. The result was that the recidivism rate for second unplanned babies was very low, and the school

boasted one of the highest graduation rates in the city. The core of teachers who provided courses at this school also taught at an alternative high school a few blocks away, so I went to visit it.

The alternative high school offered a means for drop-outs to reenter the school system and graduate. I asked one young woman, who had earlier attempted suicide, how this school was different for her. She said, "Adults listen, there aren't bells jerking you around, and I can go as fast as I want to through the work." After a year when she had wasted her life, she had completed two years of course work in one. She caught up with her classmates, would graduate, and was planning for college.

Early this March, I went back to McAllen, curious to see whether the two schools continued to thrive. I found that they had been joined into one new Options School serving 200 students. Options students represent a balance of racial, social, and economic groups from the McAllen high school district. Their common bond: They did not experience success in traditional educational settings. All came from high-risk situations that needed to be addressed, such as family dysfunction, homelessness, marriage, pregnancy, substance abuse, or combinations of these.

I spoke with Lori, a 17-year-old mother whose daughter is 2 years old. Lori is committed to supporting herself and her daughter, even though her father offers financial help. As a result, her schedule resembles that of many graduate students. She goes to school from 8:00 a.m. until noon, goes to work as a dental receptionist from 1:00-5:00 p.m., picks up her daughter at 5:30 p.m., goes to night class from 8:00 to 10:00 p.m., then studies for the next day. She intends to enter training as a dental hygienist in the summer. She said, "I was dropping out to support my daughter until Options' flexible schedule and services made school and work possible. My little girl and I are going to make it!" And they will!

Angel, 18 years old, told me of his struggle to support a wife and two children, and attend school, with no assistance from either set of parents. At the large high school, he felt as though none of the teachers or counselors cared if he stayed in school or not. He tried to attend school

and work also, but the school made no accommodation for his schedule. The only jobs he could get and go to school too, were at night, from 8 p.m. to 6 a.m. He fell asleep in class. Worse, the work paid below minimum wage, not nearly enough to support his family. He applied to Options but they were over enrolled. He could not get in. He was on the road to making easy money driving hot cars across the border when he was scared straight by an officer of the law. He envisioned himself in jail, his wife and children with no support. He went begging to Options to accept him, and they did. He is now a leader and speaks eloquently for the program. He will graduate in December 1995. And Tiwana, she is 15 and her baby is 3. They both are thriving at Options.

The Options staff provides comprehensive services to meet its students' varied needs. Counselors offer students personal and group counseling and present various activities and programs during each day's advisory period. A social worker is on hand to serve as a liaison for the student with family and community. A school nurse assists in detection, treatment and referral. Student services such as smoking cessation classes, health screening, and prenatal classes are provided for students who need them. Job opportunities and training are provided through the Job Training Partnership Act and through cooperative programs administered by the school's career/technology department. Child care is also available while students are attending classes.

These services provided on the school site makes it possible for the Options students to work, raise their children, attend school and graduate. Because the services are overlapping, it is difficult to use traditional research designs to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs. Dr. Knight will describe new approaches to new questions of effectiveness.